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Economic and environmental questions: sustainable development

Letter dated 13 April 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Seychelles to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the final report of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Seas (AIMS) Regional Meeting to follow up on implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (see annex), held in Baie Lazare, Seychelles, from 26 to 28 October 2005.

On behalf of the small island developing States that participated in the meeting, I request that the present letter and its annex be issued as a document of the Economic and Social Council, under item 13 (a) of the provisional agenda, and of the General Assembly, under agenda item 52 (b) of the preliminary list for the sixty-first session, and that it be made available to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourteenth session.

(*Signed*) Jérémie **Bonnelame**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/61/50.
** E/2006/100 to be issued.

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Annex to the letter dated 13 April 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Seychelles to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The AIMS Regional Meeting to follow up on implementation of the Mauritius Strategy

Seychelles, 26-28 October 2005

The AIMS Regional Meeting to Follow-up on Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy was convened in Seychelles from 26th to 28th October 2005 at the Plantation Club Hotel, Baie Lazare. The meeting was attended by Cape Verde, Comoros, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Singapore, the Indian Ocean Commission (COI), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), UNESCO, UNAIDS, FAO, Global Forum of Oceans, Coasts and Islands, Liaison Unit of NGOs (LUNGOS) and Centre de Documentation et Recherche et Formation Indianoceanique (CEDREFI). The meeting noted the absence of Guinea-Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe whose participation was expected. The meeting also noted that Bahrain, Cyprus and Malta had expressed through their Permanent Representatives to the UN the wish not to be represented. The donor community were invited by UNDESA to attend but were not represented. The list of participants is attached as Annex 1.

The meeting was convened pursuant to General Assembly resolution 59/311 calling inter alia for the three regional follow-up meetings.

The opening session was chaired by Mr Claude Morel, Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Statements were made by Ms. Diane Quarless, Chief of the SIDS Unit, (UNDESA), Madame Monique Andreas-Esoavelomandroso, Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission (COI), and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Seychelles, His Excellency The Honorouable Patrick Pillay. The statements are attached in annex 2 of the report.

Mr Claude Morel, Seychelles was elected Chairman of the Meeting, Cape Verde was elected Vice-Chairman, Mauritius was elected as Rapporteur with support from Seychelles, COI and UNDESA.

The purpose of the meeting was to review and evaluate progress in the region and instill a renewed resolve for taking action on the sustainable development priorities for the AIMS region.

Session 1 – Setting the Scene

The session was held on the 26th October, and was facilitated by Mr Claude Morel, MFA. The objective of the first session was to review priorities and mechanisms for implementing the UN MS at national, regional international and levels.

Presentations were made by Ms Diane Quarless (UNDESA, UN SIDS Unit) and Madame Monique Andreas-Esoavelomandroso Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission (COI), and brief national updates were given by country participants.

Statements and questions raised by Mauritius, Seychelles, Cape Verde, Comoros, Singapore, Maldives, COI, FAO, UNESCO and CEDREFI.

It was recalled that the SIDS themselves are primarily responsible for implementing BPoA and MSI, but require in the process the effective support of the donor community and relevant IGOs.

The role of the UN system should also be considered for how best support should be mobilized for the implementation of the MSI. The Inter-regional SIDS Meeting to be held in Rome in November 2005 would in this context constitute an important opportunity for the region. It was also recommended that the Rome meeting be discussed in the context of developing proposals for AIMS regional and national action, so that priority activities and projects/programmes could be brought forward. Rome will also give important consideration to SIDS-SIDS cooperation.

While the AIMS region is very diverse with historic, geographic and social differences of the Member States, there are many similarities in the impacts of the challenges faced by the AIMS SIDS that draw the group together in cooperation for sustainable development.

It was noted that improvements in communication between AIMS is needed and the process to develop a coordinating mechanism needs to take this into account, as well as having a process for effective resource mobilization. It was reaffirmed that COI has been playing an important coordinating role as the interim secretariat, yet is constrained by resources in further expanding services. The AIMS website has been launched through the COI structures. It was noted that the COI have proposed to utilize this information portal to publish an AIMS regional bulletin. Consideration should be given to also entrusting this portal as the regional hub for SIDSNet.

The challenges faced by AIMS SIDS are far greater than many of them can tackle by themselves and would thus clearly benefit from cooperation and inter-SIDS solidarity. Issues such as natural disasters and climate change are often beyond AIMS SIDS means.

Noting that the UN GA at its 59th session has now endorsed the MSI, and given a mandate to the UN system to ensure that the MSI is implemented in a coordinated manner, there is a need for the SIDS regions to articulate their concerns. The UN agencies have been constituted in an Inter-agency Consultative Group (IACG) chaired by DESA, and focal points were encouraged to be established in each of the UN agencies.

Participants noted that OHRLLS has a mandate in support of SIDS, but is strictly circumscribed to advocacy for SIDS, while DESA/DSD has responsibility through the SIDS Unit on substantive matters. It was agreed that as a matter of priority and in accordance with GA resolutions substantial strengthening of the SIDS Unit would be pursued at the highest levels, including at the Rome meeting, as would be the need for coordination of the SIDS Unit with OHRLLS, in such a way that

OHRLLS advocacy would be informed by the concerns and challenges of the SIDS regions, in particular the AIMS region.

Many delegations continued to express concern at the lack of international support for SIDS, which requires greater commitment from the UN and its specialized agencies and a strengthening of national and regional mechanisms. It was stressed that national and regional mechanisms would be enhanced with concomitant improvement in the international level coordination and cooperation for SIDS.

It was also recommended that in defining the regional support mechanism for AIMS consideration of linking AIMS to the UN system should be pursued. The region should also review how the specialized agencies can and are contributing to sustainable development in AIMS. Channels of communication between AIMS and the UN system should be reviewed with a view to improvement.

The national dialogue highlighted the need to establish or strengthen national processes for sustainable development and called for technical and financial support to such processes, as well as sharing of information of experiences and best practices through the COI portal. In many cases while there is a committee structure at national level for sustainable development there is a need to amend the functioning of such committees to become more of an executive board or executive body with both technical skills and access to funds to achieve targets for sustainable development. This would ensure the linking of for example national road maps for sustainable development to government policy, and for promoting inter-ministerial cooperation. It was also noted that cooperation modalities such as the Seychelles post-tsunami reconstruction and relief efforts could be of interest to the other SIDS.

The Singapore technical assistance program is being extended in the multiplicity of areas within which Singapore has expertise for another 5 years as SIDSTecII (for details see www.mfa.gov.sg/scp/).

It was noted that a number of projects are being launched in support of the MSI, as exemplified by the UNESCO continuing work on education for sustainable development and the work of other international organization. Clarifications were sought as to the degree to which international organizations are providing actual financial resources to these projects and initiatives.

Session 2- Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and the Regional Perspective

The session was held on the 26th October, and was facilitated by Dr J. L Roberts (COI). The Objective of this session was to identify how national, regional and international partners can best work together for the pursuit of MDGs and the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. Presentations were made on three models of programme management; 'HIV/ AIDS' by Dr. Joy Backory UNAIDS, 'Disaster Management' by: J.L Roberts and 'Oceans and Coastal Management' by Dr. Nirmal Jivan Shah.

Statements were made and questions raised by Seychelles, Cape Verde, Mauritius, FAO, UNDESA and UNESCO.

It was noted that it would be of interest to AIMS to promote evidence based programme management, and four model papers were presented on different themes highly relevant to SIDS in this regard, namely:

- Priority setting and MDGs (a deconstruction of the MDG framework): presented by Dr J L Roberts of COI
- Knowledge based approach for the better response to HIV/AIDS: paper presented by Dr Joy Backory on behalf of the COI/AIMS/UNAIDS partnership
- Disaster management: paper presented by Dr J L Roberts on the Commonwealth Secretariat report commissioned following the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami
- Oceans and Coastal Management: paper presented on behalf of the Global Forum on Ocean Coasts and islands

In developing evidence based plans it was recognised that there exists a wide range in stages of development of AIMS countries and their capacity for adaptation. This highlights the need to see the limitations of the MDGs as tools for priority setting and resource allocation and hence the need for careful examination of their use in defining fields for cooperative approaches for the AIMS. While MDG implementation would benefit from an evidence based approach to the diagnosis and selection of most appropriate interventions, there should also be consideration of adapting the MDGs to more relevant development goals at national level.

Participants noted that prerequisites for successful implementation of the MDGs and the MSI include clear support from the Member States, the AIMS coordination mechanism and from donors. Consideration should be given to the recruitment of a facilitating team. All AIMS SIDS need to have national focal point who should ideally be a member of a national multisectoral coordination committee/mechanism. Funding support needs to be secured on a predictable basis, and ideally should have at least some national commitment. Regional action frameworks must be clearly linked with regional strategies and actions as well as national priorities and needs. National projects would in many cases not have been eligible for support from international sources, hence the benefit in having regional projects. But regional projects must start with an appropriate acknowledgement of national priorities and needs, and should build on national reports and needs assessments, such as the GEF national capacity self-assessments and the national sustainable development strategies called for at the Mauritius International Meeting.

Participants highlighted the need to establish standing mechanisms at national level to be responsible for implementation of sustainable development. The development of appropriate indicators for gauging progress in implementation would assist building effective institutions and cooperation between AIMS SIDS.

UNESCO and FAO suggested working with NEPAD as a means of making progress with implementing systems for using renewable sources of energy for production and for investment in the agricultural sector. FAO recommended that the SIDS forum promote the implementation of the mid-term investment program in the agricultural sector. UNESCO recommended use of the training

program in the Pacific, which shows the requirements for very particular skills for delineating claims to exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and for settling boundary issues.

The creation of a AIMS panel experts for deployment in the region and for staff training was also suggested.

Session 3 – Institutions and Co-ordination

The session was held on the 27th October, and was facilitated by Dr.J.L Roberts (COI).
The objective of this session was to review the planning, financing and management mechanisms for implementing of the MSI, at national, regional and international levels and to note the progress made with the national sustainable development strategies. Presentations were made by Ms. Diane Quarless (UNDESA), Mr Rolph Payet (Seychelles), Ms. Gina Bonne (COI) and short interventions by country participants.

National sustainable development strategies or their equivalent have been called for since Agenda 21, up to WSSD and MIM. The rationale for sustainable development strategies requires balancing the three pillars but also balancing the participation of stakeholders and coordination with government. A model NSDS consists of a coordinated set of participatory and continuously evolving processes of analysis, debate, decision-making, capacity development, planning, investment, monitoring and evaluation, which seeks to integrate the short and long term economic, social and environmental objectives of society, through mutually supportive approaches wherever possible - managing trade offs where this is not possible.

There should be a move starting from a broader awareness of sustainable development through better coherence and coordination in the short term, to full integration of the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental).

To be effective it was recommended that there should be a shift from government control of the sustainable development agenda to a greater engagement with stakeholders (at least partial engagement in the short term) and shared responsibility of implementation.

There should be a shift from sectoral approaches towards the development of cross-sectoral approaches and ultimately to a fully implemented cross-sectoral approach.

The principles of sustainable development should be promoted in ways that everyone can understand.

In the discussion of national circumstances it was noted that while great progress has been made in many AIMS SIDS on the MDG targets there are still challenges such as pockets of poverty and life-style related diseases. There were also certain important cross-cutting issues. These included the need for building capacities and specialization which are difficult to accomplish in small states which may lack tertiary education and professional training institutions. Other gaps in capacity included skills in performance review and the development of effective partnerships between the public and private sectors. New forms of institutional development were necessary to fill these gaps common to many

SIDS. The development of national indicators to track progress in aspects of development peculiar to small states is however a necessary task to more accurately reflect the national circumstances, development needs and progress made.

Sustainable financing could be considered through the establishment of trust funds, but requires a strategy for resource mobilization. More thought needs to be given to the mechanisms for promoting progress towards MDGs and the types of incentives that might be most effective so that people were encouraged to take action rather than viewing changes as an imposition.

It was important to have a legally defined framework for ensuring effective and meaningful participation of all stakeholders in planning and implementation of sustainable development. Consultative processes must take into account the different working procedures of civil society and governments, as well as the changes in personnel that regularly occur in governments and in NGOs.

Consideration of possible regional mechanism

It was noted that the current situation of staffing at COI may only be continued for 10 months. There is a need to mobilize funds for meetings and consultative processes, and this requires a political process and a commitment from the non-COI SIDS to proceed with any proposed programmes. For this reason an operating arrangement may be required to be developed.

It was also important to note that the future political forum for governing the AIMS partnership needs to be made clear. Questions were raised in relation to the differences in membership between COI and AIMS whether it is possible to differentiate the activities of COI for COI alone versus activities of COI in support of AIMS.

It was also noted that there is a need also to get the views of the absent AIMS countries.

It was agreed that technical planning should continue whilst consultation proceeded on the nature and scope of a more formal management agreement for the AIMS Group. There was agreement that three parallel processes would be pursued, namely the development of technical plans for the AIMS Group, proposals for a more formal management framework, and fund raising for implementing the technical programme and to ensure that appropriate participation at a future ministerial meeting can be assured.

COI have prepared options for the content of future technical programmes, but the Group called for a series of political (governance) discussions on future management arrangements. The Group asked the COI to consult the AIMS Group in advance of formal ministerial discussions to finalize a proposal on the future regional programme and management arrangements as per annex 3 of the report.

Session 4 – Work Programmes

The session was held on 27th October. The objective of the session was to identify the common national priorities, to agree on the outline work programme and to propose specific areas for partnership for implementation. Mr. Espen Ronneberg (UNDESA) gave brief information about the

University Consortium of the Small Island States, Ms. Gina Bonne (COI) presented options for the AIMS Group Programme and Ms Diane Quarless (UNDESA) on the MSI Matrix.

The University Consortium of the Small Island States (UC-SIS) was noted as an important capacity building opportunity, and progress in the development of near, medium and long term aspects would be circulated to all SIDS.

In terms of the DESA matrix, the participants looked at the actionable mandates and what current programs, or planned activities would arise because of MSI, that could be used as the key information for the SIDS to access resources. Focal points would be established in most agencies, and a commitment given to meeting regularly and updating information. For this purpose the agencies will also have to provide funds.

The comprehensive completed matrix will provide information to the countries and agencies to see where support can be found, provided that the integration of sectors perspective is maintained. Participants also noted the information from UNDP on the changing ethos of assistance away from projects to a more programmatic approach through direct support to government and IGO budgets. There is therefore a need to look at the programme priorities for AIMS with a view to identifying supporting partners in the UN system.

Participants noted that having an AIMS secretariat would also be helpful to ensure that the UN serves the AIMS region more adequately and effectively. It is also important to ensure that there are complementarities in the activities of the different agencies.

Session 5 – Country work programmes and their regional and international support Requirements.

The session was held on 27th October and facilitated by Mr. Rolph Payet (Seychelles) and Dr.JL Roberts (COI). The objective of the session was to introduce the draft work programme Matrix proposed by Seychelles, as a tool for review of the scope and content of national programmes for sustainable development and their regional and international support requirements.

Seven priority issues were identified by the participants – HIV/AIDS, disaster management, water and food security, oceans and coasts, climate change and sea level rise, and trade. Three working groups were established to look at the priorities.

The main issues and actions recommended from the working groups were as follows: Support national efforts to complete the delimitation of maritime boundaries; support programmes to strengthen the monitoring, reporting, enforcement and control of fishing vessels to reduce incidences of IUU fishing; acquisition and installation of surveillance and monitoring equipment; support efforts to early ratification and accession to relevant fishing agreements; support the design and implementation of integrated policies for the management of MPA's; support national and regional initiatives on adaptation to climate change and appropriate technology; action on the Clean Development Mechanism; review or strengthen national and regional strategies including public

education to control and combat HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases taking into account country and regional specificities; seek and enhance partnerships for programmes to combat HIV/AIDS with national, and regional entities with international development partners, relevant UN agencies ie. WHO, UNESCO, UNAIDS; Water: to broaden access to water for all SIDS; to enhance SIDS-SIDS Cooperation; International Community Support for Capacity Building; ntegrated water Resources Management through different initiatives; Food security: Enabling environment for food security, self reliance and agricultural diversification; Seed production & integrated pest management; Promotion of agro-industry; Promotion of aquaculture; Promote research and development and use of modern technologies; Ensure affordable provision of essential nutrition; Management of waste: promote sustainable waste management; best practices & innovative solutions to waste management; control of transboundary movement hazardous waste; disposal of quantity of waste at sea (London Dumping Convention); trade; and natural disasters.

Recommendations of the working groups are detailed in annex 4 and form an integral part of this report.

Session 6 – Way forward

The last session was held on the 28th October. The Objective of this session was to identify the milestones in the process for implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, the national, regional and international programmes. Presentations were made by UNDESA SIDS Unit on the main conclusions of the other regional meetings, on the Linkages of the CSD14/15 themes and by FAO on the ministerial meeting on SIDS 18 November 2005.

Statements and questions were made by Mauritius, COI, FAO and UNESCO.

UNDESA presented a summary of the conclusions and recommendation adopted by the Caribbean and Pacific regional meetings.

It was noted that the 14th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD14) offers an opportunity to highlight the link between climate change, energy, atmosphere and industrial development through innovative options. For example if SIDS themselves show how biofuel can be a substitute for fossil fuel, this promotes to the international community options they can take to decrease the use of fossil fuels that are at present contributing to Climate Change.

Participants acknowledged that energy is a key factor in the sustainable development of SIDS and their levels of foreign exchange. To increasing SIDS resilience to external factors such as oil prices, requires innovation and examination of best practices in making better use of local resources.

Engaging research through SIDS-SIDS partnerships such as the University Consortium can facilitate sharing of experiences and appropriate technologies to promote biofuels.

AIMS SIDS can learn from each other and other SIDS regions. The use of biofuels in the Pacific region is a good example of the feasibility of such initiatives which can be shared. There are many

solutions within the AIMS region to sustainable use of resources and substitution for costly imported products and these need to be highlighted. There are many innovative ideas that need to be explored particularly through SIDS-SIDS cooperation.

Participants noted though that all islands are different and there are no single solutions for all. What is important is to promote review of alternative and to stimulate innovation. Participants strongly urged that renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes to be pursued as a matter of priority and called for international support in this regard.

FAO made an introduction to the Special Ministerial event to be held on 18 November 2005 on Food Security and Sustainable Development in SIDS, and highlighted the specific actions undertaken in support of the SIDS. Participants noted FAO's initiatives in the Regional Food Security Programmes in the Pacific and Caribbean regions and requested similar initiative for the AIMS region to be raised in the Ministerial Meeting referred to above.

Conclusion of the meeting

The session was held on 28th October, and was chaired by the Chairman. The report of the meeting was presented by the Rapporteur. Statements were made and questions raised by Seychelles, Mauritius, Cape Verde, Maldives, COI, CEDREFI, FAO, UNAIDS, UNESCO and UNDESA.

The background documentation from the meeting was considered very helpful by the participants, and will be put on a master CD. This will be distributed to participants as well as posted on the AIMS website with hyperlinks to more detailed material available elsewhere (www.coi-inf.org click on AIMS), including the AIMS Synthesis report and the AIO report (now in English, French and Portuguese). In addition, the UN DESA road map provides a timetable of events in the process of implementation from 2005-2006.

Singapore, on behalf of all the delegates, thanked the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur, and the host Government and the people of Seychelles for the excellent arrangements for the meeting.

Diane Quarless expressed deep appreciation on behalf of UNDESA for the cooperation and excellent conditions for the meeting, thanked the COI and the UN system representatives for their cooperative spirit and wished the delegates safe travel home.

Gina Bonne expressed the thanks of the COI to the Seychelles Government, the UN system colleagues and the delegates for their excellent contributions to a successful meeting.

The Chairman made a closing statement, highlighting the success of the meeting and the progress achieved, noting the spirit expressed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Seychelles in his statement, and thanked the organizing committee and Secretariats for their hard work, and declared the meeting closed.